A LETTER *from the Member of* Parliament, *in Answer to the Letter of the Divine, concerning the Bill for* Uniting PROTESTANTS.

The Letter of the Divine has been put into ſo many hands that it was thought unneceſſary to reprint more of it, than the Breviates in its Margin; but the Reader, if he pleaſes, is deſired beſides to compare the Letter it ſelf.

DIfferences of opinion are ſo apt to ariſe, and I am ſo much for *Union*, that I cannot but take the trouble of telling you, that you and I were much better agreed at our laſt meeting, than you ſeem to think: For I do not remember that I was ſo diſaffected with the word *Comprehenſion* in the *Church*, as that you ſhould think to oblige me with the other of *Union*; that alters the matter as little, as if you ſhould recommend a Bill for the *Union* of the two Kingdoms to the State, by calling it a *Comprehenſion*.

Many prejudiced againſt the Bill for the name of it.

I hope too that the *Deſign* is not to *break the Frame*, but for a *greater firmneſs*. For tho ſome pull down an old Manſion-Houſe to ſell the Materials, and ſome to build a new Folly after a foreign Model, as a Specimen of their late improvement by Travel; yet others, I grant you, make ſuch alterations as better the Seat. I do not therefore reject all Alteration; for I would be as glad as any to ſee the good old Houſe improved, but I like it ſo well as it is, that I deſire firſt to be ſatisfied in the Propoſals, before I engage too far with the Undertakers, for I know how willing that ſort of Men are to make themſelves work.

Of the deſign of it.

Our Church is not ſo unreaſonable, as to ſay, that all her Appointments are *unalterable*, and ſo much other Churches muſt confeſs too; ſhe is capable of amendment I grant you, and ſo ſhe will ſtill be, I ſuppoſe, after your *Corrections and Supplies*, and I know no other Church that is not; but whether the Model that is offered will amend it or make worſe, that, if we are wiſe Builders, we ſhall conſider firſt: For as the *Romans have altered for the worſe*, ſo may the *Engliſh* too.

That it is agreeable to the Principles of the Church of *England*.

The Condeſcenſions that were promiſed on our ſide are not to be forgot; and further, I wiſh that the occaſion of that promiſe may be

Some ſuch thing promiſed to be done by us.

be forgot, the late dangerous *Condeſcenſion* of ſome Men to the Romiſh Party. But his memory muſt be ſhort who doth not recollect that this *Temper* promiſed, was ſuch an one as ſhould be ſo eſteemed by a Parliament and a Convocation, that is, a proper and expedient Temper in the regular way. And if the Church men deſire that this Method may be followed, they will not deſerve to be reproached with an ill Conſcience in keeping their word: Neither will the Church deſerve therefore the name of a *Perſecuting* Church, tho ſhe has been unjuſtly perſecuted with it all along by ſuch, who, when in power, were the greateſt Perſecutors themſelves, and whoſe *Temper* will always make them ſeem to themſelves under Perſecution, till they can perſecute again. This Cry was raiſed by the Jeſuits themſelves againſt us in the late Reigns, and a Book of Martyrs preparing, and now it may be taken up again. But this makes not Comprehenſion neceſſary, it may be ſufficiently provided for by a Bill for Toleration; for the National Church of *England*, tho ſhe does not alter, will be no more a Perſecuting Church, than the National Church of *Holland*, who is not about to alter, as we hear, and continues to exclude above half of the Inhabitants.

And neceſſary to remove the Objection that has been made againſt us of our being a *Perſecuting Church.*

But I am not only for a Toleration, I am in my judgment for a *review of our Conſtitution*, as much as any of you Divines, and hope it may be made with ſo much Chriſtian Prudence, as may ſhew we are grown *wiſer* by our greater *Eperience.*

We are now better able to know what is fitting to be done than we were heretofore.

It is indeed to be lamented, that the Diſſenters Objections cannot be removed by *Anſwers of ſo great ſtrength and plaineſs.* It remains therefore only to remove the occaſion; that is, to take away ſuch things, againſt which there is no reaſon; out of Charity then let it be done, and a *Bill of diſcreet Charity* it will be indeed, that ſhall take away all Scruples, prevent all Prejudices, and reduce us to perfect Union. But you may remember, I took the liberty, in our private Converſation, to tell you, that ſuch promiſing Bills of general Cures are put into your hand in every ſtreet.

That it is the only way to remove the *Diſſentrs Scruples.*

The Bill is uot yet come to us, but I have have inquired, and find, that beſides the liberty the Laity have by it, the Miniſter is at liberty to wear or not to wear the Surplice, to kneel, or to ſtand, or to ſit at the Communion, to baptize, or not to baptize, with the ſign of the Croſs. And ſome tell me, they are not ſure whether he is obliged to approve the Doctrine and Diſcipline of the Church in which he officiates; and that Ordination by the hands of the Presbtyery is ſo owned, that it capacitates him for a kind of Licence from the Biſhop; theſe they ſay are the preſent Alterations, and Twenty Divines of your acquaintance are to have the Royal Commiſſion, to con-

That this *Bill* will be no prejudice to *Eccleſiaſtical Power.*

conſider afterwards of many more, and more weighty, to be preſented hereafter to the Convocation (I hope) and Parliament. Now againſt this Method of removing the *Diſſenters anſwered Objections*, there ſeem to me to be ſeveral weighty Objections I wiſh might be anſwer'd as eaſily, ſome of which I ſhall mention preſently. But as to the Eccleſiaſtical Power, of which you allow me to be tender, all that the Divines of my acquaintance deſire, is the power of hearing and deliberating concerning ſuch Propoſals in a Convocation: And if this preparatory Act be of an Eccleſiaſtical nature, they requeſt the ſame Power may be granted them here; for the Church-men, I think, have ſuch a Right, and if they have not, yet they are proper Adviſers, and ſo numerous, and ſo learned a Body as the Eccleſiaſtical Commonalty is, ſhould have ſome regard had to them, as well as to the Diſſenters, and be repreſented not by a few Men of a ſort, but by a Convention at leaſt of their own choice, being neither ſo ſuperſtitious nor ſo ignorant, as in the times you mention of Queen *Elizabeth*.

Nor take away the *Fences* of our Church.

All the reaſon of Fences to the incloſure of a Church, is to keep thoſe out that are not fit to come in, or will, if they are ſuffered to ſtay in, diſturb it, to maintain Truth and Devotion in Unity and Order. Now our Fence againſt Falſe Doctrine and Diviſions is an Approbation required from every Miniſter of the Church, to what is ordered in the Church; for, if he ſcruple to ſay he approves the Doctrine, he is not to be truſted with the teaching it; and if he approves not the Diſcipline, he will practiſe it but untowardly. This *Fence* is ſo natural a bound, that there is no Church wants it; and whoever attacks it, intends to take the place, and, for ought I know, to raſe it. It is for the ſecurity of the Church to keep up ſuch a *Fence*, whatever the *trouble* may be; and they will be *troubleſom* Men indeed, that will not approve what ſtands, when we are willing to alter all that is not to be *approved*.

I will not ſay that the Obligation to wear a Surplice, is one of our *Fences*, tho it may ſerve conveniently as a Shibboleth to keep thoſe out of the Miniſtry, who are either ſo weak as to conceit an illegality in the Habit, or ſo hypocritical as to pretend it. But this I think, that if the Surplice be not abſolutely diſcharged, but the Miniſter be left to his choice; there will then be no *Fence* againſt a contrary Practice in the Dioceſs, and againſt the impoſſibility of the Miniſter's humouring all the Congregation by his choice; that is, againſt the Wrangling and Faction that will ariſe between Miniſter and Miniſter, and between Miniſter and Pariſhioner on that Subject: A Diſpute that the Biſhop will have no Authority left to determin. Neither

ther let any Man pretend that ſuch Trifles will not diſturb a Dioceſs or a Pariſh, when we find they are ſo conſiderable, as to trouble a Parliament, and to interrupt the publick Affairs in ſo preſſing a conjuncture.

The direction of the People to ſome one decent Poſture at the Sacrament, is commonly thought a convenient *Fence* againſt irreverence, at leaſt diſorderlineſs: And there is no Church that does not expect her Communicants in the ſame poſture. But allow us Laity a greater liberty in *England*, yet ſuch an Order upon the Miniſter will be, in my judgment, but a neceſſary Fence againſt parochial Schiſms (to go no further) that will otherwiſe follow: For taking it for granted, that all you Church-men underſtand the nature of the Ceremony ſo well, as to know them to be indifferent, and that you will none of you make any ſcruple of giving the Communion to one ſitting (tho a Scruple on this hand would be as well grounded, as on the other, and deſerves much more regard) granting, I ſay, theſe Ceremonies to be indifferent to you; yet to the Diſſenters they are unlawful, for therefore they deſire them to be releaſed. Suppoſe then one of thoſe Minſters entered by this gap of our old *Fences* into ſome populous Congregation, and ſuppoſe the Laity of our Communion willing to receive the Sacrament at the hands of one that refuſes to kneel himſelf (a thing that may not always happen) yet the Miniſter himſelf muſt be preſumed unwilling to give it to the Lay-man kneeling, and at leaſt he will diſcourſe it, and declare againſt it. Now do you not think that this will certainly break his Pariſh, and make the People willing to receive from another hand, nay force them to another Congregation? which courſe muſt certainly end in Feuds and Animoſities, if there be no temporal Diſcontent on foot: But if there be, it is to be feared, that the ſecular Parties will diſtinguiſh themſelves by theſe Poſtures, and greater Diſorder follow than will be conſiſtent with the Peace of the Government it ſelf; and this you muſt expect, that if it ſhall once appear, that a State-party has taken away the Ceremonies, there will be a State-party for them.

I ſhould not be ſo particular in ſuch things of Church-practice, which you ſhould conſider rather than I: But give me leave to go a little further as to the Sign of the Croſs; it was uſed heretofore to be a Fence againſt ill Spirits, as they ſay; but now, I know not why, it has raiſed them. However, I think, the liberty of the Miniſter to uſe it, or no, will be very inconvenient, and that an Obligation upon him, to do as he ſhall be deſired, will be a proper Fence againſt the trouble ſome of his Pariſhioners may otherwiſe have of looking out for another Miniſter to Chriſten, as ſoon as a Diſſenting Miniſter ſhall be preferred upon them.

But

But to diſpatch this buſineſs about *Fences*, Ordination, as I take it, is another, and ſuch a one, that inſtead of being laid more open, ought to be better ſecured than it is; it were to be wiſhed, that there were more Keys than one to the door of the Fold, and that it ſhould not be opened but with great ſolemnity; for if care be not taken, there may be found a Biſhop that may in private, let in thoſe that are better kept out: I do not deny, but there may be a Form peculiar, for the admitting to the Miniſtry, ſuch as are ſaid to be ordain'd of Foreign Presbyters, or Popiſh Biſhops, but I dare not preſcribe ſuch a one. For this, I think, if any, is a matter ſo weighty, that it ought not to be determined, but by the Body of the Church.

And ſo much for the Fences, the ſtrongeſt of which, you ſay, are Unity and Number: But a Church that grows numerous by taking in Diſſenters, may be no ſtronger, than an Army that fills up its Company with Mutineers.

There is reaſon ſtill, I am afraid, to ſuſpect *reſtleſs Importunities and Deſigns of extorting the whole*; but my judgment of this Houſe (and you need not ſuſpect it) is, that it will never yield to them, and I hope for that reaſon they will not yield to ſome of theſe Propoſals, tho I know they are ready to hearken to all that are peaceable and reaſonable.

Nor lead the way to the yielding up *All* to the *Diſſenters*.

That *Diſſenters* ſhould *refuſe to acquieſce* in ſuch Terms; one would, it may be, wonder, that did not know them, but you muſt expect that ſome of them will continue unſatisfied, and that *Books againſt Epiſcopacy and Liturgy* will fly, tho you ſhould be a Biſhop your ſelf: Let our Church therefore, in the Name of God, perfect her ſelf, as ſhe can, amend, ſupply, and retrench, as may be beſt for his ſervice and the edification of the People, and commit the event to the Divine Providence.

Nor will it be any diſcredit to us if the *Diſſenters* ſhould ſome of them refuſe to acquieſce in it; As it may be they will. But on the contrary, ſuch an Union being offered by us will render them inexcuſable.

Methinks I could eaſily find a Cure for this *Diſeaſe*; for why may not thoſe few that are Paſtors, as you call them, of wealthy Congregations be provided for by the Church Preferments? ſure they will be conſidered.

And tho the intereſted Men among the *Diſſenters* may diſlike it,

For my part I think that would be a leſs chargeable Gratification to them, than to expoſe our Church to irremediable Diſorders and Factions for their pretended *eaſe*. For to deal plainly with you, tho they have been pleaſed, it ſeems, of late to increaſe their number by new Ordinations, yet I do not find the Church ſo ill provided, as to want their Miniſtry; it did not in the late exigency. And if there are of them that ſhall after competent ſtudy, really think the diſputed Ceremonies to be unlawful; this to me is ſuch a proof of their *weakneſs*, as that they ought not to undertake to teach, and ſhould in modeſty be contented with Lay-Communion.

Yet we may Reaſonably Hope, all others will approve it; the conditions of this *Bill* being very *eaſie* both to the *Miniſters*,

Now

And to the *lay-Diſſenters.*

Now to the Lay a great tenderneſs is due, and there is place for charitable Condeſcenſion, they have taken up Prejudices from the wrong information of thoſe, who pretending to inſtruct, were bound to know better. They have not had capacity, or leiſure, or opportunity, nay (as you intimate) *have not been ſuffered* to uſe the means of correcting their Prejudices, they are therefore indeed to be conſidered, and treated very charitably. Let ſuch then be permitted not to kneel, and the Miniſter be bound to admit them to the Communion at their deſire, let the Miniſter be bound to Baptize their Children without the Sign; let all reaſonable eaſe be given them, and the Surplice, if you pleaſe, quite taken out of their ſight: The Laity, by this means, will have all the Condeſcenſion you propoſe, and enjoy their own liberty in ſuch things as much as they can deſire, tho the Miniſter remains obliged: For if the ſcrupulous have their own liberty to ſtand, it is preſumed by the Project, that they will not be offended at any other, or at the Miniſters kneeling; and what difference is there to them, whether the Miniſter kneel by command or by choice? I ſay not that the Surplice too may be left upon the Miniſter for the ſame reaſon; for if you ſuppoſe he may wear it voluntarily, without Offence to the lookers on, why may he not wear it by direction without offence too? I know you intimate the *old Objection, of indifferent things becoming unlawful by their Impoſitions:* But will they be ſaid to grow unlawful to me, becauſe impoſed upon another, that will be an unreaſonable ſtretch of an Objection, that is ſo very unreaſonable in it ſelf, as to ſuffer no Eccleſiaſtical Appointments; and I will aſſure you, if our Church think fit to humor the Objection, ſhe will be the firſt that ever did. You ſee I am ready to give all the deſired ſatisfaction to the Lay; but as to the Miniſters, I do not ſee how they can be left to their choice, without more Diſorder and Confuſion, than is fit to be ſuffered for their ſakes; and I muſt take leave to tell you, that greater regard ſeems to be had in this Project to the perſonal Intereſts of a very few, whom we may well be without, than to the Peace of the whole Church.

This *Bill* if it has no preſent good effect, yet will ſecure the *next Generation*; and ſatisfie the *Proteſtant Churches* abroad, to whom it has been communicated, and who do highly approve the conditions of it.

The probable effect of this Bill ſo conditioned, I have ventured to conjecture; and you Divines ſhould conſider before-hand, the rather, becauſe you are upon a new Experiment, and which no Church has ever thought fit to try. For tho the Reformed Churches abroad (you mean the Calviniſts, as they are pleaſed to honour themſelves with the Title, in contradiſtinction to the Lutherans, *&c.*) may appear to like your Project well; as no Man diſcourages the Practice of his own Example; and as the *French* will never find fault with us for following after their Faſhions. Yet I am not ſatisfied

of

of their mind ſo, but I ſhall do by them, as we Lay-men uſe to do by you Divines, I ſhall rather look into their Lives than their Doctrine, and ſee what courſe they take at home. Now I am afraid a Man would hardly be admitted a Miniſter of their Churches, that ſhould deny to approve their Doctrine and Diſcipline; the Remonſtrants, you know, ſay otherwiſe: The Churches of *France* were not uſed to give the Sacrament to any ſitting; nor thoſe of *Holland* to any that kneel, much leſs are they uſed to ſee their Miniſters in contrary Poſtures; and if in any place, they have ſometime diſpenſed with their manner, it was done out of a particular civility to ſome eminent Stranger, not ordinarily, and to thoſe of their own Communion: Now I do not ſuppoſe that they keep to their own Rules out of any humor or oppoſition, but upon wiſe Conſiderations, and for the ſake of Order and Peace; and I cannot think, that they would ever adviſe us ſeriouſly to a Practice they do not follow themſelves. A Calviniſt Miniſter may indeed be glad, that he is without any more trouble made capable of an Engliſh Preferment, and he may write ſuch a Letter of Compliment to get one. But this is neither Authority nor Motive to our Change: And what need is there of a Foreign Oracle? or going to *Switzerland* for a direction for us in *England*? Shall Strangers be ſuppos'd to know our Circumſtances better than we? And ſhall we never think our ſelves able to do our own buſineſs our ſelves?

I am glad they abroad look upon our Church as the Centre of Proteſtant Unity, a *Proteſtant* I hope ſhe has appeared now, and a *Centre* I hope ſhe will prove, by a ſpeedy faithful direction ſhe will afford to the Proteſtant Circle (to uſe the *German* Phraſe) for the uniting and ſupporting their common Council and Intereſts. Now for that Office ſhe ſeems already to have the proper Poſition, and will, if ſhe vary much, go out of her true place; for ſo much as ſhe approaches to the Calviniſts, ſo far ſhe departs from the Lutheran, as friendly, and a much more conſiderable Body: But if ſhe Will be a *Centre*, ſhe muſt be fix'd ſomewhere, and ſhe can never be ſerviceable to thoſe abroad, if ſhe be in diſorder and confuſion at home. Let us then ſettle our ſelves on Terms of Peace and Unity, and ſo we ſhall be the better able to aſſiſt the other Proteſtants: But in order to that aſſiſtance, there is no need that we ſhould part ſo much as with the Surplice, except you think the Preliminaries of the Proteſtant Treaty were about our Rubrick, or that the *Swede* or the *Lunenburger* cannot ſuccour the *Hollander*, without ſubſcribing to the Synod of *Dort*: However, we are to be guided by the ſtanding Conſiderations of Peace and Unity at home, and not by theſe temporary Conjunctions of Princes and States, which may alter the next year.

The

This Bill approved by the truest Sons of the Church of *England*,

The acquaintance with those of your own Profession, must be larger than mine, and as the margin saith, much better, for it is with the *Truest Sons of the Church*. But I assure you, I know many, and those not inconsiderable, who have too appeared for the Churches Cause, who are against this Bill, as they hear it is framed, and who think it highly *for the cause of the Church* to have it amended,

And would be fit to be pass'd, tho it were not necessary for *Union*. We may improve our *Constitution*, tho it be *already very good*.

My Acquaintance agree with you perfectly in the general, that there is room for improvement, and that Peace and Piety may be promoted by some Change, and many thoughts they have spent upon it; but they think that this matter should be regularly considered, and not done by a few hands, and on their own heads. And they are the more apt to suspect the Prudence of the grand Change that is after designed, because they have so much reason, as they think, to dislike this *preparatory* Expedient.

None but the *Papists* who have hitherto *prevented* our *Union*. ought to be displeased at our present endeavour after it.

There was, I believe, a *Juncture lost at the return of King* Charles *II.* and the Popish Party might have some hand in it, as we do the Divel no wrong, when we make him a Party to any Mischief: But I believe, the Circumstances of that Juncture, were a great occasion of the loss, and that one cause of it might be, the extravagances of the Proposals the Dissenters then made: For I do not think that Men were so unwise, or so negligent at that time, as they may be fancied now. Some were stiff, I believe, for every tittle of the old Form, and some were far more unreasonable against the whole: The Fanaticks in the mean while, and the Papists, were for no settlement at all; and so for fear the *Juncture* should be entirely *lost*, it was thought advisable to stay no longer, but to resolve upon the present Establishment, tho it be not absolutely perfect, yet is, I will say, more perfect than any other in the Christian World, and the prudence of it appeared in the reception and general submission it had in some little time gained; as it would have prevailed universally, had not the Papists, who found themselves no Gainers by it, broke in upon it by their Indulgence of 1671. and again spawned their Conventicles all over the Kingdom. The *Papists*, we know, will take *advantage* by our *Discord*, and this Bill I would have so ordered, as not to occasion them. The Church, without the Dissenters, and united as she is in her self, has been able to make a glorious stand against Popery regnant: But if by the admission of the Dissenters, she shall be broken and divided, she may grow weaker by her new Company, and not resist so successfuly a second time.

This, I confess, is a favourable season, but not by reason of the *Protestant League abroad*; for, under favour, what breach of any Articles under that *League* will it be, if our Church remain unaltered? Or how does that *League* enable us to make ever the better Alterations? *Favourable* it is by our Circumstances at home, if we, who were almost *comprehended* in the ruine, we at least, who were united in the Defence of our Religion, would abate of our stifness for or against smaller matters, and would be ready to form such a Body as may be more firm and lasting.

May this *favourable season* be discreetly used; and let it not be lost again, by such Proposals as ought to be rejected. This Juncture will not be *lost* to the publick, if some men are not too sedulous to make it favourable to themselves.

Iam, SIR, *your humble Servant*,

M. M.